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ABSTRACT

A descriptive study based on Egyptian law, printed sources, and interviews clarifies our picture of the Egyptian Press by examining its status as a constitutionally mandated "Fourth Estate." The constitutional amendment, the resultant Egyptian Press Law, and the "Law Of Shame" (all passed in 1980), are designed to create a heavily controlled press that will help preserve the "status quo." With most press activity concentrated in Cairo and already centrally controlled by the Arab Socialist Union (which had broken with President Sadat over his peace with Israel), and with these papers dependent upon the government owned Middle East News Agency, some change of ownership was felt to be necessary. Although the Egyptian Press was subject to governmental control from the time of Nasser, the "Fourth Estate" Law transferred press ownership to the government, resting control of appointments and policy with the upper house of the legislature, the Consultative Assembly. Through the Egyptian Higher Press Council, the assembly effectively controls all the press in Egypt, even that not owned by the government. Even the theoretical press freedom granted by the Press Council is nonexistent, and under President Mubarak Egypt's press continues to resemble the Soviet press in both theory and practice much more closely than it does the free press of the Western world. (JL)

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INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION DIVISION

THE EGYPTIAN PRESS,
AN OFFICIAL FOURTH ESTATE

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The Egyptian Press: An Official Fourth Estate

By Clifton O. Lawhorne

Somewhat conflicting and confusing accounts about the status of the Egyptian press have been circulated during the past few years in the United States. One major publication, dated in 1979, states that the Egyptian press system is government controlled, though "most of the time" censorship is not necessary because of a "gentlemen's agreement" under which Egyptian newsmen censor themselves.¹ Another scholarly treatment in 1980, however, states that "greater press freedom is returning to Egypt"² as a result of the press there being recognized nationally as a Fourth Estate with "independence and precise tasks."³ Still another scholar, citing the 1980 consitutional changes in Egypt which formally recognize the press there as the Fourth Estate, warns that while press freedom has been enhanced, one should not assume this new status provides "complete freedom."⁴

Recent news accounts in the United States, though, do not indicate that freedom of the press has been enhanced at all in Egypt. Rather, these accounts talk about specific instances of government-imposed censorship in Egypt, including instances of news blackouts,⁵ newspapers being shut down,⁶ Egyptian newsmen being arrested or silenced,⁷ and foreign journalists being expelled by the Egyptian government.⁸ Further, some of these accounts -- with a surprising lack of uniformity -- refer to the

Egyptian press alternately as "semi-official,"⁹ "government supported,"¹⁰ "government supervised,"¹¹ and "government controlled."¹²

These seemingly contradictory reports and terminology raise the question: What is the status of the press in Egypt? More specifically, how does the press in Egypt function as a Fourth Estate? What freedom, if any, exists for newsmen there, and what censorship or controls are exercised by the government of Egypt? These questions form the thrust of this descriptive study and are examined in an attempt to clarify the rather hazy picture of the Egyptian press that is projected in this country.

The study's discussion, based partially on Egyptian press laws and publications as well as news accounts and statements from Egyptian newsmen, is limited to the print media. This includes Egypt's public and private press. The public press includes the six major nationally-circulated daily newspapers and in excess of a dozen weekly newspapers and magazines published at six national publication houses. The very few private publications, of limited circulation, are sponsored by tolerated political parties, religious groups, scientific, cultural and professional organizations. No effort is made to explore Egypt's electronic media, which have always been owned and operated by the government and are not officially a part of the Fourth Estate. As one Egyptian broadcast official has stated, everything is omitted from the airways that "contradicts the national or international policy of Egypt."¹³

The Fourth Estate

Today, though, there are many similarities between the Egyptian broadcast and print media in their relationship to government. Like the broadcast media, the Egyptian print media have been eliminating contradictions of government policy since the Egyptian people in May of 1980 passed a constitutional amendment making the press, as such, the country's Fourth Estate.¹⁴ At that time, the public press, which previously had been nationalized under ownership of the defunct Arab Socialist Union, was constitutionally adopted by the Egyptian government. The adoption did not make the press a figurative Fourth Estate such as is found in the western world -- separate from government and free to criticize, check and balance the three official branches of government. Rather, in a most unusual experiment, the press actually became the fourth official branch of the Egyptian government -- supposedly on a par with the executive, legislative and judicial branches.¹⁵ It assumed a position unheard of in modern times, a unique position in that no other nation's press has received the formal recognition as an official fourth branch of government.¹⁶

The Egyptian people, at the time they approved the constitutional amendment, had been given almost no information about the Fourth Estate other than generalities that its establishment would free the press from the other powers of the state.¹⁷ The people, then, simply voted for the concept. What

the Fourth Estate meant, specifically, was not known until two months later.

It was then that the Egyptian Press Law implementing the Fourth Estate was passed by the Egyptian legislature, the People's Assembly, after last-minute changes had been instituted by the Egyptian Cabinet and approved by the then president, Mohammed Anwar el-Sadat.¹⁸ Interestingly, the Cabinet session had been chaired by the then vice president and now president, Hosni Mubarak.¹⁹ The changes Mubarak and Sadat approved in effect restricted a measure of freedom in the existing draft law by eliminating a provision that allowed journalists on national newspapers to elect their own editors and board chairmen, the day-to-day managers of the press.²⁰ Journalists, then, got a much more restrictive Fourth Estate than they had expected. The Mubarak-Sadat changes assured that the board chairmen and editors, who are held responsible for content, would be appointed by the government.²¹

Specifically, this appointing power was given to the Consultative Assembly, the new upper house of the legislature, which also was declared the owner of the mass-circulated national press.²² The law also set up a government administrative agency, the Higher Press Council, to approve any private publications, and editors, on a contractual basis.²³ This Council also was declared the policy making body for all the press -- private as well as public.²⁴ The law, as passed, also specified that journalists on the national newspapers would be

public employees.²⁵ Additionally it stated that the purpose of the press was to contribute to the "formation and guidance" of public opinion through expression "within the framework of society's basic function."²⁶

What does this mean? Perhaps the answer was supplied by then President Sadat, who at one point brought together officials from all four government branches (including editors and managers of the press) to instruct them to abide by the "objectives of the Egyptian people."²⁷ Separately, he told Egyptian journalists on March 31, 1981, that the purpose of the press is "to help bring stability and prosperity to the community, and not disillusionment and grudges."²⁸ Sadat also made it clear on that occasion, the 40th anniversary of the Egyptian Journalists' Syndicate, that while the press as the Fourth Estate is independent of other government branches, the journalists are subject to the "authority of the law" and have a responsibility to "protect the Egyptian democracy."²⁹ It was not freedom, but responsibility, that was stressed.

As if this were not enough, Sadat used the meeting with members of the press to stress that Egyptian journalists "slandering their country abroad" would be prosecuted under the 1980 Law of Shame. The implication was clear. Journalists, whether abroad or in Egypt, should watch what they write about their country. The Law of Shame makes it a crime to "advocate opposition to, hatred of or contempt for the State's political, social or economic systems."³⁰ All Egyptian journalists are subject to

this law, which also makes it a crime to publish misleading news or to repudiate religion, moral or national values.³¹

The journalists also may be prosecuted for violation of their official code of ethics, which has been adopted by the Fourth Estate law to prohibit the publication of "doubtful information" or the attribution of words or deeds without "adequate verification."³² The Egyptian press as the Fourth Estate, then, is put in a strait jacket by law -- in that it must publish only government information that is verified by government, cannot repudiate national values, and cannot oppose government policies and systems.

Whatever the Egyptian people envisioned, then, when they voted for the constitutional amendment setting up a Fourth Estate, they obviously ended up with a heavily controlled press. The power elite, adding the final touches to the law implementing the new estate of government, made sure that the people who directed the other branches also would direct the press. It was clear that the object of the Egyptian press under the Fourth Estate arrangement, as envisioned by the rulers, was to preserve the system, the political status quo. The Fourth Estate became a reality in Egypt on July 19, 1980, when Sadat signed the Egyptian Press Law.³³ Shortly afterwards, the then Egyptian Minister of Information, Mansour Hassan, stated that the law should be a "message to all those who wanted to drive a wedge between the regime and the press."³⁴

Components of the Press

The co-opting of the press by the Egyptian government brought forth grumbling on the part of some journalists, but the move faced no real opposition.³⁵ One reason for this was that there were so few publications to deal with, and for all practical purposes they were located in one city, Cairo, making it easy for the government to keep an eye on the press. Another reason was that the press had long since been nationalized and controlled through central publishing houses owned by the Arab Socialist Union. Ownership at the time the Fourth Estate was formed, though, was questionable as the Arab Socialist Union and Egypt had broken ties over Sadat's peace initiatives with Israel. Some change of ownership had to be made. Still another reason was the already existing government controls, with President Sadat not hesitating to remove editors or journalists who were critical of his policies.³⁶ Further, since the rule of Gamal Abdel Nasser, editors had been appointed and journalists had not been able to work unless they belonged to the Egyptian Journalists' Syndicate. For years, then, they had been "licensed" and had worked in "closed shops." The Fourth Estate was not that much of a change.

Neither did the Fourth Estate change the fact that only six major daily newspapers serve Egypt. They are published in Cairo for national distribution, and they reportedly have total circulation of approximately three million.³⁷ The bulk of the

circulation is accounted for by the three Arabic language newspapers, Al Gomhouria, Al Ahram, and Al Akhbar and their special weekly editions centering on Friday, the Moslem holy day. These editions are Al Gomhouria el Khamis, published on Thursday, Ahram el Gomaa, published on Friday, and Akhbar el Yom, published on Saturday. With a very much smaller circulation, two newspapers, Le Progress D'Egypt and Journal D'Egypt, are published in the French language.³⁸ The English community in Egypt is served by The Egyptian Gazette and its Saturday edition, The Egyptian Mail. All of these newspapers today are part of Egypt's official fourth branch of government.

In addition to the national dailies, Egypt has a number of weeklies, both newspapers and magazines. The most important of these today, perhaps, is Mayo, the newspaper of the National Democratic Party, which is the party of those in power. Other widely read publications include October, a magazine that specializes in political and economic news; Akher Saa and Al Mussawar, illustrated weekly magazines; Rose el Yussef, a political weekly; Sabah el Kheir, general interest weekly; Hawaa, a women's weekly; and El Kawakeb, a cinema and theater weekly. These have a total circulation in excess of a million and a half weekly.³⁹

Additionally there are weekly literary, children's and specialty publications, such as for religious, scientific and cultural groups. These include several publications that were suppressed by Sadat just prior to his assassination -- Al Dawaa, voice of the fundamentalist Moslem Brotherhood; Al Shaab,

publication of the opposition Socialist Labor Party; and Al Takadum, published by the smallest official opposition group, the National Union Progressive Party.⁴⁰ Two major rural newspapers, The Alexandria, published in Alexandria for Lower Egypt, and Al Nass, published in Aswan for Upper Egypt, also are in existence.

Serving all these publications -- and the foreign correspondents in Egypt -- is the Middle East News Agency. This wire service is owned and operated by the Egyptian government and has close ties to the Egyptian Ministry of Information in determining what should and should not be published.⁴¹ The agency, known by its initials, MENA, is the premier wire service in the Arab world. In Egypt, it also services foreign correspondents by publishing the daily Cairo Press Review, an English language roundup of news published in Cairo's Arabic newspapers.

This is an important function, as the number of foreign correspondents working out of Cairo is quite large, with one authority listing a total of 350 representing 31 nations.⁴² Major agencies are operated by the four international wire services -- Associated Press, United Press International, Reuters and Agence France-Presse. There also are 29 English-speaking bureaus, including those for the New York Times, Los Angeles Times, Washington Post, and the ABC, CBS and NBC networks.⁴³

To a large extent, the foreign correspondents are free of controls and use satellite and wire transmission to dis-

tribute news freely across the Egyptian borders.⁴⁴ Such is not the case, however, with those working for Egyptian publications. Their publications are tightly controlled. With the exception of a very few specialty, religious and party newspapers -- whose operations still must be approved by the government's Higher Press Council -- all of the newspapers and magazines in Egypt are distributed by the government-owned Egyptian Distribution Agency and are published out of six press establishments owned by the government's Consultative Assembly.

These establishments include those of the great dailies, the Al Ahram Press Organization and the Al Akhbar Press Organization, each of which publish other journals. The other major Arabic daily, Al Gomhouria, is published by Al Tahrir Press Organization, which also publishes Le Progress D'Egypt, Journal D'Egypt and The Egyptian Gazette. The fourth publishing house, Dar El Hilal Press Organization, publishes several weeklies including the illustrated Al Mussawar, Hawaa, and El Kawakeb. The fifth, Rose el Yussef Press Organization, publishes Rose el Yussef and the popular Sabah el Kheir. Dar Al Maaref Press Organization publishes October magazine and other literary, scientific and cultural works. Each of these press establishments, under the Fourth Estate concept, has a board chairman and editor-in-chief appointed by the government's Consultative Assembly with responsibility for adhering to "the law."⁴⁵

Background of Control

Ownership of the press through these publishing companies did not originate with the Fourth Estate law, however. It began back on May 24, 1960, during the presidency of Nasser, with a decree on "The Organization of the Press." The decree placed ownership of the publishing companies, and newspapers, in the hands of the National Union, and later under control of the Arab Socialist Union.⁴⁶ At that time, the newspaper Al Ahram said the change was "absolutely necessary to end the influence of capital on government and press, to protect the interest of the people against exploitation and opportunism, and to safeguard a socialist democratic and cooperative society."⁴⁷ Interestingly, the policy of the then press owner, the Arab Socialist Union, was that government policies were "to be explained and advocated, but not criticized."⁴⁸ Criticism meant jail for a journalist under Nasser, and reforms in this respect did not come about until Nasser's death in 1970, when Sadat, formerly an editor of the daily Al Gomhouria, became Egypt's president.⁴⁹

It was during this year, 1970, that a law was passed in Egypt setting up the Journalists' Code of Ethics. This code, as was pointed out earlier, required that journalists gather information only by "legitimate means," prohibited publication of doubtful information, and stipulated that newsmen could not attribute words or deeds to anyone without adequate verification. However, the code also provided that no journalist would be discharged or transferred to non-journalistic jobs "except within

the framework of the law." It also allowed the Egyptian Journalists' Syndicate, in which all journalists had to hold membership, to take any and all disciplinary action against newsmen, without interference from government agencies.⁵⁰ The government, under former journalist Sadat, had found a way to relax outward government controls by letting the journalists police their own ranks -- within the confines of fairly strict regulations.

Then in 1974 Sadat, who himself had replaced editors, including Mohammed Hassanein Heikal of Al Ahram for stating the October war with Israel was neither a victory nor a defeat, ordered that censorship of the press be lifted except for national security information.⁵¹ Material from the government ministries, however, was carefully funnelled to the press through a government Information Office and the Middle East News Agency.⁵² Further, editors-in-chief were given specific responsibility to accept or reject all articles. Again, a way not to censor but to control information was instituted.

The appearance of openness was given. Also Egypt under Sadat opened its doors to foreign journalists in 1974 and lifted censorship of news cabled by foreign reporters to their news agencies and newspapers.⁵³ With the move, many foreign correspondents returned to Egypt after a long absence, and Cairo replaced Beirut as the center of Middle East news operations.⁵⁴

The outward show of press freedom and lack of censorship -- so far as foreign correspondents were concerned -- prevailed

until after the 1977 riots in Egypt. After these riots, Sadat did two things. First, he started discussing an "official" Fourth Estate for Egypt. Secondly, he took steps to circumscribe the measure of freedom that had been offered the press.⁵⁵ For example, because of what he called "negative reporting" on the food riots, Sadat ousted David Hirst, correspondent for England's Guardian. He also suppressed leftist writers and journalists in the country, and as one scholarly publication put it, deprived the opposition of "any forum for mass public expression."⁵⁶ The purge also extended into the established publications, which were now openly controlled by the government because of the demise of the Arab Socialist Union in Egypt. One of the publications, Rose el Youssef, had its management replaced by Sadat because that management differed with his official explanation that food riots were caused by communist and leftist adventurers.⁵⁷ The publication had stated only that "everybody knows that we are suffering from high costs and that life has become difficult to bear."⁵⁸

Obviously, Sadat felt that the press had become difficult to bear, and he set up an official panel to draft provisions of the Fourth Estate to co-opt the press by government. He also began to take measurers -- staying within the law -- to silence journalists without removing them. To illustrate, Mustafa Amin and Galal El Hamamsi, eminent columnists of Al Akhbar who had criticized government actions, were allowed to keep their jobs but were prohibited from writing political columns in the

press.⁵⁹ In another instance, Mohammed Said Ahmet, editor of the opinion page of Al Ahram, found on returning from a lecture tour of the United States that he had been moved from his office. As the International Herald Tribune stated at the time: "Instead of receiving jail sentences, Egyptian critics of Mr. Sadat's policies become 'prisoners of work' -- they keep their jobs, but their articles are not published."⁶⁰

Some, though, were jailed. Reportedly six writers, four of them left-wing journalists, were put in jail in Egypt during 1979.⁶¹ Further the Socialist Labor Party's newspaper, Al Shaab, was closed once in 1978 and again in 1979. The crimes were (1) criticizing a government shift in policy and (2) publishing allegations of irregularities concerning Premier Mustapha Khalil in arranging a telephone contract with an European consortium.⁶²

It was with this backdrop of events that the controversial Law of Shame was enacted in April of 1980, just three months before the Fourth Estate was implemented. This law made it a crime (1) to advocate opposition to or hatred of Egypt's political, social or economic systems, (2) to advocate the repudiation of religious, moral or national values, (3) to publish misleading news or any information which could inflame public opinion or threaten national unity or (4) to publish material undermining the dignity of the state.⁶³ This, according to one international journal, raised "doubts as to where Mr. Sadat's brand of Democracy is leading the Egyptians."⁶⁴

The law also was criticized in Egypt. One journalist there

said it would "paralyze all pens,"⁶⁵ and another stated that simply describing Egypt's economic situation would be advocating opposition to and hatred of the state's economic system.⁶⁶ Also the opposition newspaper, Al Shaab, again questioned the Sadat administration by stating the purpose of the Law of Shame was specifically to protect the government from criticism -- "a means to close all doors in front of opposing opinions."⁶⁷

Press Management Today

This law that shut off opposing opinions remained in effect after the Fourth Estate was established in mid-July, 1980. It is true that the Egyptian Press Law implementing the Fourth Estate took a positive approach, stressing freedom, by stating that "there is no authority over the journalist in performing his role except that of the law."⁶⁸ However the negative, suppressive aspect of the provision was made clear less than two months into the Fourth Estate experiment. At that time, the Law of Shame was used to arrest an Egyptian writer who published abroad material that was critical of President Sadat and his peace policies. In analyzing the arrest, a correspondent for the Washington Post said it was obvious the Law of Shame made it "open season on those opposed to Sadat's version of Egypt and the policies of peace with Israel."⁶⁹ Further, depicting the press situation as it then existed, under the Fourth Estate concept, the Post correspondent stated that publication of such criticism within Egypt was impossible "because the government

exercises strong influence over whatever gets into print and controls publishing facilities and newspapers." 70

This control of publishing facilities is exercised, in the first place, though the Consultative Assembly, the upper house of the Egyptian legislature. This assembly now owns, in the name of the Egyptian government, all the national newspapers and magazines that previously had been owned by the Arab Socialist Union.⁷¹ It also owns the National Distributing Company and the Middle East News Agency. Further this owner reflects the views of the ruling elite, as it consists entirely of members of the ruling National Democratic Party and of people appointed by the president.⁷² And these Assembly members appoint the board chairmen and editors-in-chief for each national publication and agency.⁷³ The appointees, of course, are chosen -- again -- because they are sympathetic to the desires of those who appoint them.

Additionally the appointees are held responsible for publication content, with editors being subjected to fine or imprisonment for violation of rules.⁷⁴ As one Egyptian journalist stated, the editors' jobs depend on the Consultative Assembly, whose members are appointed by the ruling party, and the editors censor their publications to "tell what the ruler wants."⁷⁵ The Consultative Assembly further assures this by appointing the majority of the directors in each publication association and the majority of the general committees on each newspaper.⁷⁶ The Consultative Assembly, then, has direct input

into the publications themselves.

Additionally the Consultative Assembly has tremendous indirect influence -- through the second layer of controls that are exercised by the Egyptian Higher Press Council. This press council is not a typical "western" press council that calls attention to breaches of ethics, hoping for voluntary compliance by the publishers.⁷⁷ Rather, the Egyptian council -- appointed largely by the Consultative Assembly -- reports directly to the president of the Egyptian republic and is set up to guarantee "the safety of national unity and social peace"⁷⁸ It does this by making policy for all the press in Egypt, even that not owned by the government.

All private publications -- those put out by Egyptian political parties, religious groups or specialty organizations -- must be licensed by a "personal privilege" contract issued by the Higher Press Council.⁷⁹ This contract is issued only after all details as to editors, purposes and staff are approved, and the contract can be revoked.⁸⁰ Furthermore all editors and newsmen on the private publications must be members of the Egyptian Journalists' Syndicate.⁸¹ And they, like the public employee journalists on the national newspapers, are subject to the officially binding Journalism Code of Ethics, the Law of Shame, and the provisions of the Fourth Estate press law.⁸² Reports that any of these laws have been violated by a journalist are investigated by the Higher Press Council, which then can submit charges to the Journalists' Syndicate for disposition,

which could include jail terms. The so-called private press, then, is almost as heavily controlled as the national press.

The controlling agent, the Higher Press Council, is presided over by the president of the Consultative Assembly, giving the government's upper house of parliament direct supervision. The members of the Higher Press Council are the individual board chairman of the national newspapers, the distributing company, the Middle East News Agency, the Workers' Union, and the Journalists' Syndicate -- as well as the editors of the party newspapers and eleven other public figures appointed by the Consultative Assembly.⁸⁴ In fact, only a minor element of the press council -- the chairman of the Workers' Union, the chairman of the Journalists' Syndicate and the editors of the three party newspapers -- are not appointed by the Consultative Assembly. The power, then, flows from the top down.

The Higher Press Council does have an advantage so far as Egyptian newsmen are concerned. It is made up of people connected with the press itself. Even the eleven appointed public figures must be interested in or connected to the press.⁸⁵ Hence the theory is that these people, who must be consulted in all laws pertaining to the affairs of the press,⁸⁶ are knowledgeable as to the needs and desires of the journalists. This is important, considering that the Higher Press Council is the agency charged with investigating complaints levied by others against journalists, to determine if official charges should be brought.⁸⁷ It also is the agency charged with protecting the rights of journalists.

The rights the Council is charged with protecting center on job security. Specifically, the Council guarantees minimal pay for all journalists and grants permission to those seeking to work or reside outside the country or to work for non-Egyptian media within the country.⁸⁹ The law also states that journalists are not to be removed from their jobs for expressing opinions.⁹⁰ They also are granted the right to obtain information without divulging sources, "within the limits of the law."⁹¹

Besides insuring the rights of journalists -- and their responsibility -- the Press Council also has rights, including that of gathering information. It has the power to request information from all government agencies and can ask government officials for clarification of issues and policies.⁹² There is, then, a measure of independence from other governmental agencies for this fourth authority of government as it goes about its task of forming and guiding public opinion in Egypt. This seems to be, though, the only measure of independence allowed under the Fourth Estate operation.

Suppression of Dissent

Tragically, the independence is more theoretical than real. There is no doubt that the Egyptian press has the right to, and does, criticize government bureaucrats for failing to carry out government policies.⁹³ That freedom of criticism does not extend, however, to government ministers, the vice president and president -- the ones who determine Egyptian policy. This practice -- of

exalting the state and furthering the policies of the ruler -- is strikingly similar to that described in the so-called Soviet-Communist theory of the press. Means can be criticized, but not ends. Criticism of ends would be considered injurious to national values, as some editors -- particularly on political and religious newspapers -- found out shortly before President Sadat was assassinated.

Sadat at that time made it clear that he would not tolerate, in the Egyptian Fourth Estate, what he called the "abominable individualism of the Western free press."⁹⁴ Because of adverse criticism, he shut down seven private newspapers, jailed a number of journalists, and transferred 67 others to non-journalism jobs, making them "prisoners of work."⁹⁵ Among those arrested were Hamed Zeidan, editor of Al Shaab; Ahmed Farghali, Al Shaab journalist; Omar Telmessani, editor of Al Dawaa, newspaper of the Moslem Brotherhood; Mohammed Abdul Koddus and Ibrahim Younis, journalists with Al Dawaa; Hussein Abdul Razak, editor of the National Unionist Progressive Party newspaper, Al Takadum, and his wife, Farida Nakkash, reporter on Al Akhbar newspaper; and Mohammed Hassanein Heikal, free-lancer and former editor of Al Ahram.⁹⁶ Furthermore in this "crackdown" period, Sadat extended his purge to foreign correspondents in his country. He ordered Chris Harper, ABC newsman from the United States; Jean-Piere Peroncel-Hugoz, reporter for Le Monde in France, and Soviet journalists Konstantin Kapetonov and Aleksander Sourikov deported for "negative reporting."⁹⁷

These suppressive moves were backed by the Egyptian national press, which reported that the private newspapers were undermining national unity and stirring up "sectarian sedition."⁹⁸ As if this were not enough, Sadat, two weeks before his death, instructed the Higher Press Council to "investigate any Egyptian journalists who wrote critically of Egypt."⁹⁹ In an appearance before the Press Council, he stated that Egyptian journalists should not try to emulate journalists of foreign countries. "Each society has its own circumstances and traditions," he was quoted as saying. "I want no press that imitates the American press. The American press school has failed in Egypt."¹⁰⁰

This indictment of the American press in itself was interesting, considering that the Fourth Estate concept reportedly was introduced to the Egyptian Minister of Information, Mansour Hassan, while he was attending a press meeting in the United States.¹⁰¹ He took the concept back home, but the warped version of the Fourth Estate that Sadat's administration formulated resulted in a press system -- intentionally or unintentionally -- that today closely resembles that of the Soviet Union. Recently describing the Soviet press, Murray Seeger, European economic correspondent for the Los Angeles Times and former Moscow bureau chief, stated:

The press in Russia is dedicated to preserving the political and economic system as it is. The main function is not to inform the people. It is to preserve the system. You must remember that the press is run by the same people as the government. The government doesn't allow any attack on the system. They'll criticize the local managers, the weather, and others,

but not the system. The upper level people are in the inner circle of the government, so they can't really make any mistakes. ¹⁰²

If one would substitute Egypt for Russia in Seeger's quote, the description of the Egyptian press established by Sadat ¹⁰³ would be quite accurate.

That the same people in Egypt control the government and the press was made quite clear when Sadat was assassinated. At that time there was, as one magazine stated, a "virtual news blackout" in Cairo. ¹⁰⁴ With the first assassins' shots, Egyptian government leaders refused to give out information, electronic transmission was embargoed, and foreign newsmen could get no details, including those on Sadat's condition, for three hours. ¹⁰⁵ Further, the legally required "verified information" that was carried in the assassination stories in the next morning's newspapers noticeably came from Vice President Hosni Mubarak, who was featured almost as prominatly as Sadat. Headlines played up the fact that Mubarak already had been nominated for the presidency. ¹⁰⁶ The press, obviously following the official view of the government power elite, was hewing to the law by promoting stability in a badly ruptured Egyptian political system.

Evidence also shows that Mubarak, quickly elected president as the only candidate on the ballot, felt that the press should voice the view of the ruler. This was pinpointed when, two weeks after Sadat's death, he met with the various Egyptian editors-in-chief and ordered them to stop attacks that had been

made during Sadat's presidency on other Arab nations. Instead he instructed them to concentrate on domestic affairs.¹⁰⁷ "We are not going to start attacking any of these countries," Mubarak was quoted as telling the editors. "We will give them an opportunity to assess the situation, and we shall see."¹⁰⁸

Mubarak's order in this instance was not isolated. At other times he instructed that newspapers not publish advertising congratulating him on becoming president, he banned the publication of pictures of his wife and children in the press, and he ordered that a radio documentary laudatory to Sadat's reign be cancelled.¹⁰⁹ The press was being directed in the same manner as the broadcast outlets. Obviously the press was not free to print what it pleased. Mubarak, though, did free some journalists who had been jailed by Sadat earlier, including the editor and some newsmen who worked for Al Dawaa, the Moslem Brotherhood newspaper.¹¹⁰ He also allowed the two previously banned opposition political parties to resume operations.¹¹¹

He obviously had no intention, though, of relinquishing control over criticism. For instance, he told governors of the various Egyptian provinces that he would show "no mercy" to those who challenged government.¹¹² That he meant this was shown later when he had 31 persons, who the Middle East News Agency called communists, arrested for circulating pamphlets attacking his domestic and foreign policies.¹¹³

Conclusions

Dissent under Mubarak, then, is still being suppressed, and there is no wonder that recent United States news accounts refer to the Egyptian press as government supervised or government controlled. It obviously is -- through restrictive laws, Higher Press Council policies and appointed or "contract-approved" editors who are held responsible for the content of their publications. As a result, criticism of public policy makers is non-existent in the government-owned, mass-circulation public press. Even criticism in the small-circulation private press, where any opposition is likely to originate, has been effectively muzzled by the very real threat of government sanctions. These publications could be closed, as they have been, and prison sentences could be meted out, as they have been, for any criticism considered by the power elite to threaten the political system or national unity. No element of the Egyptian press, then, can be considered free to take issue with the established order.

The evidence is clear that the Egyptian press is not a free press as such a press is known in the western world. It is rather a controlled press, and that control today comes through the Fourth Estate concept as it has been applied in Egypt. Under the Fourth Estate arrangement there, the Egyptian press takes its place beside the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government.

The press itself, then, is an authority of the Egyptian

government and hence cannot be expected to attack or seriously criticize that government. Further as the fourth authority in government, the Egyptian press is no doubt considered by those in power to be the spokesman of other government authorities, the parrot of official policy, the guardian of the Egyptian character, and the medium of stability for the Egyptian community as it now exists. The overall policy concerning the press appears to be the same as it was under the ownership of the Arab Socialist Union during Nasser's rule -- that government policies are to be announced, explained and supported, but not criticized.

Footnotes

¹ William A. Rugh, The Arab Press (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1979), p. 43.

² John C. Merrill and Harold A. Fisher, The World's Great Dailies: Profiles of Fifty Newspapers (New York: Hastings House, 1980), p. 59.

³ Ibid., p. 56.

⁴ Fauzi M. Najjar, "How Genuine Is Egypt's Democracy?" New York Times, June 14, 1980, 23:5 (Prof. Najjar teaches at Michigan State University, and the article was an interpretative analysis prepared for the newspaper).

⁵ "Groping For News From Cairo," Time, Oct. 19, 1981, p. 62; "The World Press Freedom Review," IPI Report, 31:1 (Dec./Jan., 1981), p. 8; New York Times, Nov. 2, 1981, 12:3.

⁶ "The Crackdown in Cairo," Newsweek, Sept. 21, 1981, p. 62, tells of seven newspapers being shut down in Egypt. Also see New York Times, Sept. 5, 1981, 1:2.

⁷ IPI Report, op. cit., p. 8; New York Times, Sept. 4, 1981, 3:2; Facts on File, Vol. 41, 1981, p. 648; AP story, Arkansas Democrat, Feb. 12, 1982, A1:31.

⁸ New York Times, Sept. 11, 1981, 3:4; Sept. 14, 1981, 4:3; Sept. 16, 1981, 11:1. Also IPI Report, op. cit., p. 8.

⁹ The semi-official designation usually is applied to the newspaper Al Ahram, though it has no different relationship to the government than other national newspapers. See "Mubarak Wins Some Time," Newsweek, Nov. 2, 1981, p. 54; Facts on File, op. cit., p. 836; AP story, Arkansas Democrat, Sept. 15, 1981, A3:4.

¹⁰ New York Times, Sept. 27, 1981, 6:1.

¹¹ New York Times, Sept. 15, 1981, A3:4.

¹² Washington Post, May 23, 1981, 21:1, discussing the Middle East News Agency being state controlled; New York Times, Sept. 5, 1981, 1:1; AP stories in the Arkansas Democrat, June 19, 1981, 3:1 and March 7, 1982, 6A:1.

¹³ Mervat El Oraby, "The Egyptian Broadcast Media," unpublished paper prepared for class at the American University in Cairo, with statement based on interview with Mrs. Awatef ElBadry, director

general for broadcast planning in Egypt, May 20, 1980. Also see Cairo Press Review, June 4, 1980, p. 18, which discusses how President Mohammed Anwar el-Sadat instructed the managers of the Egyptian-owned electronic media. Also see Douglas A. Boyd, "Development of Egypt's Radio" 'Voice of the Arabs' Under Nasser," Journalism Quarterly, 52:4 (Winter, 1975), p. 645.

¹⁴ The election approving the Fourth Estate was May 22, 1980. It also did away with the Arab Socialist Union and made Sadat president for life. Facts on File, Vol. 40, 1980, p. 769; Cairo Press Review, May 22, 1980, p. 21; New York Times, May 23, 1980.

¹⁵ Cairo Press Review, May 10, 1980, p. 2 and May 15, 1980, p. 7, which details how Sadat brought representatives of all four authorities -- the press, the executive, the legislative, and the judicial -- together for a speech he made on the 9th anniversary of the Egyptian May 15 counter-revolution. This was in anticipation of the people approving the Fourth Estate.

¹⁶ Najjar, op. cit.

¹⁷ Cairo Press Review, May 22, 1980, p. 21, on day of election again was stressing an "independent popular authority" with no details.

¹⁸ Cairo Press Review, July 8, 1980, p. 7A; July 9, 1980, p. 8.

¹⁹ Ibid. Mubarak also presided over a committee session of the ruling National Democratic Party when it, too, approved the restrictive changes.

²⁰ Ibid. Also see Cairo Press Review, July 11, 1980, p. 9. The original drafting committee had proposed not only that newspaper personnel elect their own editors-in-chief and board chairmen but also that the Fourth Estate be an independent people's authority, separate from government, according to Ahmed Al Sawi, a committee member, who spoke to journalism graduate students at the American University in Cairo on "The Drafting of the Fourth Estate Law," April 9, 1980. The committee, though, was dissolved and the draft changed. Even then, the election provisions were eliminated at the last minute.

²¹ Cairo Press Review, July 8, 1980, p. 7A; July 9, 1980, p. 8.

²² Cairo Press Review, July 11, 1980, p. 10; Egyptian Mail, January 10, 1981, 2:7. Also Egyptian Press Law of July 14, 1980, Article 23, as published in Al Ahram, July 7, 1980, p. 6.

²³ Articles 10-16, Egyptian Press Law of July 14, 1980, hereafter referred to as Press Law.

- 24 Egyptian Mail, Jan. 10, 1981, 2:7.
- 25 Article 26, Press Law.
- 26 Chapter 1, Article 1, Press Law.
- 27 Cairo Press Review, May 15, 1980, p. 7.
- 28 The Egyptian Gazette, April 1, 1981, 1:1.
- 29 Ibid. Also Chapter 1, Article 3, Press Law.
- 30 "Law on Protecting Values From Shameful Conduct" (Quantum el Eib), draft copy of the Magnus Shaab (People's Assembly), Provision 2.
- 31 Ibid., Provisions 3, 4.
- 32 "Charter of Work and Code of Ethics, Arab Republic of Egypt," (Article 72 of Law No. 76/1970, Section 2), as carried in J. Clement Jones, Mass Media Codes of Ethics and Councils: A Comparative International Study on Professional Standards (Paris: UNESCO Press, 1980), p. 50. Also Article 38, Press Law.
- 33 The law was issued on July 14, 1980, but was not signed into law until five days later. Egyptian Gazette, April 1, 1981, 6:1, where Sadat discussed the chronology. Also Cairo Press Review, July 20, 1980, p. 1.
- 34 Nazly El Etreby, "The New Fourth Estate," unpublished paper prepared for class at American University in Cairo, July 22, 1980, p. 2. She interviewed Mr. Hassan shortly after the Fourth Estate was implemented.
- 35 The law was criticized in the Moslem Brotherhood newspaper prior to enactment. See Mohammed Abdul Kodus, "Dangerous Defects in the New Project of the Journalism Law," Al Daawa, February, 1980, p. 47.
- 36 Among others, Mohammed Hassanein Heikal, editor of Al Ahram, was fired for stating the October war with Israel was neither a victory nor a defeat. See Raymond William Baker, Egypt's Uncertain Revolution Under Nasser and Sadat (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978) p. 163.
- 37 Ibrahim Ezzat, "What Do You Know of Egypt's Press," Cairo Today, 2:8 (May 1-15, 1981), p. 8. This circulation figure, though, is not audited and certainly is questionable. Editor and Publisher Yearbook, 1981, p. III-67, shows 1,250,000 circulation for Ahram el Gomaa and 1,097,971 for Al Akhbar el Yom. The circulation for Al Gomhouria el Khamis is listed there at 50,000, but official

figures placed it at 491,300 in April, 1981. See Egyptian Gazette, April 1, 1981, 1:3.

³⁸ Ezzat, op. cit. Each of these publications, as well as the Egyptian Gazette, has circulation of less than 30,000.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Newsweek, Sept. 21, 1981, p. 62; IPI Report, 31:1 (Dec./Jan., 1981), p. 8, and New York Times, Sept. 5, 1981, 1:2. Al Shaab has circulation of about 50,000, New York Times, Dec. 3, 1980, A19:1; Al Daawa has about 80,000 circulation, The Economist, 227:7172 (20-26 Feb., 1981), p. 32.

⁴¹ El Oraby, op. cit., p. 9.

⁴² Zeinab Ibrahim, "Foreign Newsmen in Cairo," unpublished paper prepared for class at American University in Cairo, March, 1980, p. 1.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 2.

⁴⁴ Egyptian Mail, Jan. 10, 1981, 3:3; Ibrahim, op. cit., p. 4; personal discussion with Abdulla Schleifer of NBC in Cairo and other correspondents.

⁴⁵ Articles 17, 21, 22, Press Law. The press organizations are detailed in Mervat Shoukry, New Media For The Developing World (Cairo: AID, 1978), p. 24.

⁴⁶ Anouar Abdel-Malek, Egypt: Military Society (New York: Random House, 1968), pp. 146-47. The press associations were reorganized in April, 1962, and have changed little since.

⁴⁷ Al Ahram, June 1, 1960, 1:3.

⁴⁸ John Waterbury, Egypt: Burden of the Past, Options For The Future (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), p. 250.

⁴⁹ Abdel-Malek, op. cit., p. 95. Mustafa Amin, founder of Al Akhbar, went to jail for nine years under Nasser. He now is a columnist on the newspaper he founded. See Mustafa Amin, The First Year In Prison (Cairo, 1974). Sadat discussed his tenure as editor in "Sadat: Press is an Autonomous Authority," Egyptian Gazette, April 1, 1981, 1:3.

⁵⁰ "Charter of Work and Code of Ethics," op. cit. See also Articles, 4, 38, Press Law.

⁵¹ The Egyptian Gazette, April 1, 1981, 1:1, details some

press history in a speech made by Sadat on 40th anniversary of the Journalists' Syndicate. Information on Heiskel in Baker, op. cit.

52 El Oraby, op. cit. Also a series of interviews by journalism students at American University in Cairo with newsmen in Cairo. Zeinab Ibrahim interviewed Mohammed Abdel Kodus of Al Akhbar on March 12, 1980, concerning the government information office; Shadia Albert Fahmy interviewed Mustafa Amin on Jan. 2, 1980, and Nihad Azmy also interviewed Amin on Dec. 27, 1979, concerning editors accepting or rejecting articles. It was common knowledge that Amin was prohibited by his editor on at least two occasions from writing political columns. Tawfika Tawfik also was told by Sarwat Abbaza, director of Al Ahram's literary section, on Dec. 5, 1979, that editors accepted or rejected articles on the basis of policy. The editor's responsibility for supervision was listed in Article 16, Press Law.

53 Egyptian Mail, Jan. 10, 1981, 3:3, in perspective given on foreign correspondents at the time Jerusalem Post reporters were expelled from the country. Also mentioned in Merrill, op. cit.

54 Ibrahim, op. cit., p. 4.

55 Baker, op. cit., p. 163.

56 Postscript, "Democracy in Egypt," Cairo Papers in Social Science, 1:2 (Cairo: American University in Cairo, Jan., 1978), p. 69. This account also states the government controlled press at the time attacked leftist writers in general. The ouster of David Hirst is reported in IPI Reports, 31:1, op. cit. in a perspective on the expulsion of Chris Harper, ABC newsman.

57 Baker, op. cit., p. 156. Al Taliah also was suppressed. Other accounts, New York Times, Oct. 5, 1980, 1:1; IPI Report, 28:1 (January, 1979), p. 4.

58 Baker, op. cit.

59 International Herald Tribune, June 3, 1980, 1C:5.

60 Ibid.

61 IPI Report, 28:12 (December, 1979), p. 4.

62 The newspaper was closed for three months in 1978. In 1979, the government withdrew subsidies on newsprint for Al Shaab, causing the newspaper to close. The author observed this while residing in Egypt.

63 "Law on Protecting Values From Shameful Conduct," (Qanun al Eib), Article I. Also see Washington Post, Feb. 21, 1980, A27:3, where a brief account is given.

64 "Careful, Now," The Economist, 275:7132, May 10, 1980, p. 39:3.

65 Galal El Hamamsi, interviewed by American University in Cairo journalism student Zeinab Ibrahim, at Al Akhbar, Feb. 24, 1980.

66 Mustafa Amin, in interview with journalism student Ibrahim, at Al Akhbar, Feb. 24, 1980.

67 Mohammed Helmy Murad, "A Stand With the Ways of the Ruling Party at Its Ministers," Al Shaab, March 11, 1980, 7:1.

68 Press Law, Chapter 1, Article 3; Cairo Press Review, July 6, 1980, p. 6.

69 Edward Cody, "Egypt's Poet of the Lowly Runs Afowl of Law of Shame," Washington Post, Sept. 10, 1980, A21:1.

70 Ibid.

71 Press Law, Article 23; Cairo Press Review, July 11, 1980, P. 10; Egyptian Mail, Jan. 10, 1981, 2:7.

72 A total of 140 were elected and 70 were appointed, New York Times, Sept. 27, 1980, 3:4; Facts on File, Vol. 40, p. 769.

73 Press Law, Articles 20, 21, 22; Cairo Press Review, July 9, 1980, p. 8.

74 Press Law, Articles 7, 9, 17.

75 The Caravan, student newspaper at the American University in Cairo, Dec. 9, 1980, p. 3; also interview with Mustafa Amin by American University in Cairo journalism student Pakinan Ramsey on Dec. 27, 1979. Al Ahram also made it clear, shortly before the Fourth Estate became a reality, that the chief editor is to supervise the execution of policies, Al Ahram, Oct. 19, 1979, 2:1; 3:10.

76 Press Law, Articles 18, 19, 20; Cairo Press Review, July 8, 1980, p. 7A.

77 See Lennart Groll, "Freedom and Self Discipline of the Sweedish Press," Current Sweeden, No. 253 (Stockholm, Sweeden: Svenaka Institel, June, 1980), pp. 7,8. The British Press Council also works on a voluntary basis, as does the National News

Council in the United States. Kamel Zoheiri, the then chairman of the Egyptian Journalists' Syndicate, pointed out the differences before the Fourth Estate was established in Egypt. See George Shafik, "Definition of a Journalists," The Egyptian Gazette, Jan. 23, 1980, 4:3.

78 Press Law, Articles 27, 39.

79 Press Law, Articles 10-16; Egyptian Mail, Jan. 10, 1981, 2:7.

80 Press Law, Articles 16, 17.

81 Press Law, Article 17; Cairo Press Review, July 8, 1980, p. 7A.

82 Press Law, Article 38.

83 Ibid.; Cairo Press Review, July 6, 1980, p. 2.

84 Press Law, Article 28.

85 Ibid., Article 27.

86 Ibid., Article 36.

87 Ibid., Articles 37, 38.

88 Ibid., Article 37.

89 Ibid.

90 Ibid., Article 4.

91 Ibid., Article 5.

92 Ibid., Article 35.

93 Author's personal observations from two year's reading of the Egyptian Gazette and Cairo Press Review, which recapped news from Arabic language newspapers in Cairo. Observation also shared by Douglas Watson, "Egyptian Press Still Under Constraints," Los Angeles Times, Dec. 12, 1979. Mr. Watson was a correspondent in Cairo.

94 "Sadat: Press An Autonomous Estate Governed By Law," Egyptian Gazette, April 1, 1981, 1:1.

95 "The Crackdown in Cairo," Newsweek, Sept. 21, 1981, p. 62; "Sadat Cracks Down on Internal Opposition," Facts on File, Vol. 41, 1981, p. 648. "The World Press Freedom Review," IPI Report, 31:1 (Dec./Jan., 1981), p. 8.

96 New York Times, Sept. 4, 1981, A3:1. and Sept. 5, 1981, 1:2.

97 IPI Report, 31:1, op. cit.; New York Times, Sept. 16, 1981, 1:1.

98 New York Times, Sept. 9, 1981, 3:1. Sadat himself referred to the "sectarian sedition."

99 New York Times, Sept. 27, 1981, 6:1.

100 Ibid.

101 Ahmed Al Sawi, "The Drafting of the Fourth Estate Law," a talk made in a journalism graduate seminar at the American University in Cairo on April 9, 1980. Mr. Al Sawi was a member of the committee to draft the law, but he said the committee was dissolved because of its views that the Fourth Estate should be independent of government and that newspaper personnel elect editors and managers of the press.

102 Iowa Journalist, Fall, 1981, 5:3. Seeger was talking to students at the University of Iowa.

103 El Etreby, op. cit., She interviewed Information Minister Hassan shortly after the Fourth Estate became a reality. He is quoted by her as saying the final Fourth Estate law represented the thinking and ideals of Mr. Sadat.

104 "Groping For News From Cairo," Time, Oct. 19, 1981, p. 62.

105 Ibid.

106 Al Akhbar and Egyptian Gazette, Oct. 7, 1981, 1:1. Mubarak also was quoted as saying all of Egypt's commitments would be honored, although he officially was not in a position to back this statement at the time.

107 IPI Report, 31:1 (Dec./Jan., 1981), p. 8. Also Newsweek, Nov. 2, 1981, p. 54.

108 AP story published in Arkansas Democrat, Oct. 22, 1981, 12D:4.

109 New York Times, Nov. 2, 1981, 12:3.

110 "World News In Brief," IPI Report, 31:2 (Feb., 1982), p. 4.

111 U.S. News and World Report, Feb. 8, 1982, p. 66.

112 New York Times, Oct. 18, 1981, 1:5.

113 AP story in Arkansas Democrat, Feb. 12, 1982, 7A:1.